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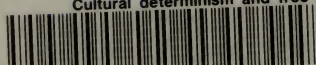
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Cultural determinism and free will



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FREE WILL



LAWRENCE K. FRANK

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and FREE WILL

BY

LAWRENCE K. FRANK



HEBREW UNION COLLEGE -
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CINCINNATI

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FREE WILL AND DETERMINISM HAS BEEN A PERSISTENT question, usually a source of dispute, over the centuries. It has given rise to an immense literature. I assume this topic was selected for this meeting, not to rehearse these historic issues, for which I obviously am not competent, but rather to examine this ancient question as it appears today, to see what, if any, new understanding we can bring to its consideration.

When any question or problem persists over the centuries, it may be but an archaic survival or it may be a recurrent expression of a genuine perplexity arising from experience.

Apparently, and here I speak with hesitation, the conception of determinism and of free will reflects two undeniable aspects of human conduct. There are recurrent regularities and repetitions, statistically valid predictabilities in human affairs which have been interpreted as the product of some coercive, deterministic powers, forces, mechanisms, (whatever has been the preferred terminology of the prevailing climate of opinion) ruling over or determining man's activities. And there is plainly evident the highly idiomatic, idiosyncratic individual engaged in purposive striving and goal seeking, dealing with the world of events and other people in terms of meanings and values that are often different from others, or at least individually interpreted.

The varied attempts to reconcile these apparently conflicting aspects of human activity are writ large in the history of ideas as part of man's persistent efforts to explain or understand the universe, usually in terms of some power,

force, mechanism or spirit that controls all events. These formulations expressed the attempt of the human observer-participant to find some pattern that would reflect his often helpless feelings of impotence in the face of a precarious and seemingly indifferent world, but give him some feeling of being autonomous, at least of understanding that world.

But these speculations will lead away from the subject of our discussion today—cultural determinism and free will, which I take to be the latest formulation of this ancient dichotomy, the most recent expression of man's desire to be autonomous and, at the same time, his recognition of the inescapable limitations, if not coercions, of his cultural traditions upon all his conduct.

This topic, as I see it, is not an abstract philosophic debate but rather of immediate concern for all, especially for those in the field of religion, education, mental hygiene, and social work, where, often without any clear recognition, this conflict is being resolved or perhaps ignored either in favor of a conviction of free will or of cultural determinism.

Today we can approach this ancient question of cultural determination and free will with a new and promising orientation, guided by the new ideas and understandings that are cumulatively altering our ways of thinking and our assumptions.

First, cultural anthropology and contacts with other peoples have made us acutely aware of the diversity of cultures all over the world. From anthropological studies and from contacts with these people of other cultures, especially those who have come to this country, we are increasingly realizing that each culture is different and that cultures can and do change.

Then, for the past hundred odd years we have been

learning to look at the world in terms of evolution, realizing that the universe is not static but has been changing and developing over the ages. This has given us a new time perspective and accustomed us to the possibilities of change in nature, especially in organisms.

Likewise, psychoanalytic ideas have modified our former beliefs about human nature, giving us dynamic conceptions of personality development and new insights into our impulses and feelings, profoundly altering our long accepted ideas and practices of child care and rearing, education, criminology, medicine and other professions.

Moreover, if I interpret correctly recent developments in science, these discussions of cultural determinism and free will parallel the conflicts that have been taking place over the past forty to fifty years in theoretical physics. It was only twenty to thirty years ago that Eddington, the British physicist-astronomer, remarked that:

“Physics was classical on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, and quantum on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday.”

By that he meant, apparently, that physics was divided between the classical assumptions of the 19th century, with the conception of a static, mechanistic universe, of rigid boundaries, ruled by inexorable cause and effect determinism, and the new conceptions of a dynamic universe, which exhibited activities that could not be fitted into the older framework of classical physics.

Today physics recognizes that the universe exhibits both the large-scale regularities, the dependable cause and effect sequences, upon which technology has been built, and also the occurrences of unpredictable events and energy transformations that appear as genuine novelties. As Irving Langmuir has expressed it:

“We must recognize two types of natural phenomena. *First*, that in which the behavior of the system can be determined from the average behavior of its component parts and, *second*, those in which a single discontinuous event (which may depend upon a single quantum change) becomes magnified in its effect so that the behavior of the whole aggregate does depend upon something that started from a small beginning. The first class of phenomena I want to call *convergent* phenomena, because all the fluctuating details of the individual atoms average out, giving a result that converges to a definite state. The second class we call *divergent* phenomena, where from a small beginning increasingly large effects are produced. In general, then, we may say that classical physics applies satisfactorily to convergent phenomena and that they conform well to the older ideas of cause and effect. The divergent phenomena, on the other hand, can best be understood on the basis of the quantum theory of modern physics.”*

If I may venture to interpret these and similar remarks, they indicate that our conceptions of order, regularity, of system, of deterministic relations, are essentially descriptions of aggregates of mass activities, as in gas laws where we can, with unbounded confidence, predict and rely upon the regular behavior of the gas, the relation of volume, pressure, and temperature variations, because the gas exhibits convergent behavior of many, many molecules that average out in these quantified activities. In our studies and applications of gas laws and other mechanical events we are not concerned with any individual particle or gas molecule which apparently is highly disorderly and unpredictable.

At the risk of boring you with these remarks about physical theory, let me elaborate a bit by reminding you that the 19th century physics was essentially static — noth-

*Science 97:1-7. 1943. Excerpt from pp. 3-4.

ing happened except through the operation of gravitation and thermal agitation upon inert particles that were moved about in space and time by these forces. Only within the past fifty years has there been any recognition of the dynamics of events within the atom, as the quotation from Langmuir and the discussion by Schroedinger* indicate, which appear as unpredictable, individual, discrete events, the source of all activities in the universe.

As I have tried elsewhere to show,† we face an enormous task of reformulating all our old beliefs and assumptions about the universe in terms of the recently developed conceptions of dynamic, circular processes, in an evolving world. We are struggling against centuries of static assumptions to recognize that persistence requires dynamic change.

What is of particular significance here is that classical physics operated with a conception of the individual particle that was derived deductively from the study of mass events. In other words, classical physics assumed the individual particle to be and to act as it should be and act in order to fit into its theories of mass events. The discovery of quantum physics and the revelation of how individual particles actually behave necessitated a revision of these basic assumptions of physics and led to the prolonged conflicts, described by Eddington, that have been largely resolved by the recognition that there are two different aspects of events.

It is also of significance that the more recent conception of the atom and of quantum-nuclear physics has not invalidated classical physics — gas laws are still dependable — but has brought a new conception of the universe and an escape

*Schroedinger, Erwin: *What Is Life?* Macmillan Co., New York, 1946.

†Frank, Lawrence K.: *Nature and Human Nature*, Rutgers Univ. Press, New Brunswick, N. J., 1951.

from the 19th century mechanistic, materialistic, deterministic view.

Now we are probably too close to these new ideas correctly to assess their meanings and significance, but we can at least recognize that here we are being offered new ways of thinking and new dynamic conceptions that may have enormous significance for human living when we grasp their implications, especially as they bear upon our present theme.

If we recall how the Newtonian conception of the universe gave rise to the psychological, political, economic and sociological thinking of the 18th and 19th centuries, we may anticipate that these new conceptions will have a profound influence upon the social sciences in the years ahead. Indeed, we can today begin to see how these dynamic conceptions are opening new leads to creative thinking and social-cultural studies.

Already we can see that some of the assumptions that have supported a belief in cultural-social determinism are in need of critical re-examination.

Thus the belief that human conduct in society is controlled, if not wholly determined, by some superhuman mechanism or system, long accepted by most economists, political scientists, sociologists and lawyers, as the basic assumption of their disciplines, is now being questioned or given up. These classical social theories were built upon a Newtonian conception of a superhuman self-equilibrating system of mechanism, operated by large social forces to which man must obediently submit. This view has recently been expressed by Hayek in *Road To Serfdom*.

Our social theories have been deterministic in the sense that they have asserted the existence of these superhuman

economic, political, social systems, somewhere out in space, and have attributed whatever occurs to the supposed forces operating those systems of mechanisms. And, like classical physics, social theory assumed the individual man to be what these theories implied or necessitated — as we see in the conception of human nature implied or explicitly stated in classical economics, political science, sociology, and law.

It is indeed interesting to see how social theories have wrestled with the question of determinism and free will, trying to maintain the doctrine that whatever happens in a society is the result of these superhuman coercive forces, but also trying to provide for some degree of individual human choice and autonomy, utilizing a conception of human nature that gives the individual some freedom, but only to do what the system requires of him, as in classical economic theories. These classical social theories are now being revised, but the old conception of human nature largely persists.

Coming directly to the question of cultural determinism and free will, can we begin to reformulate this seeming conflict in terms that may provide some more fruitful and productive approaches to our contemporary conflicts and difficulties?

One way to do this is to turn from those abstractions to a consideration of the events and processes involved in the culturizing of the child, where we can see how and in what way culture coerces the individual growing child who, nevertheless, retains to a greater or less extent his autonomy.

The newborn infant arrives with all the wisdom of the body derived from his mammalian ancestry and with the insistent organic needs for air, food, mothering, etc. Being physiologically plastic and flexible, the infant can be shaped, patterned, modified or transformed. Thus, for example, the

infant has an urgent need to breathe, to carry on the functional process of respiration, inhaling and exhaling as long as he lives, but breathing as a physiological process is partly transformed into crying, sobbing, laughing and, later, talking: a basic organic need and continuing functional process being utilized for purposes that derive, not from the organism's physiological requirements, but from the interpersonal relations, first with parents and then with others.

Likewise hunger, the need to eat, is an urgent organic need, but eating is a physiological process which is soon patterned and regulated, as hunger is transformed into individualized appetite for specific kinds of food, eaten at regular intervals, with all kinds of preparations and concomitants. The need for food is channelled into various purposive strivings, goal-seeking, symbolic fulfillments, utilized as an expression of feelings and strong emotions, and gradually becomes established as a social activity.

Again, elimination is an organic necessity, governed initially by the physiological requirements of the young organism. But elimination, the spontaneous release of urine and faeces, is patterned, regulated, transformed into continence, cleanliness, sanitation, modesty, often infused with strong feelings, and, like food intake, not infrequently utilized by the child to please or to resist the parent.

These homely, familiar aspects of early child rearing indicate how parents, as cultural agents, operate to pattern organic functions, to transform organic needs into purposive conduct, and by this process parents release the child (more or less) from the coercion of his own organic necessities. He is no longer governed wholly by his organic needs and functional processes, but becomes increasingly responsive to external social situations as presented by parents. To

these he gives varying responses, using a variety of patterns and expressing different feelings.

Likewise, in the reaction to pain, to denials and other threats, the child exhibits the primitive capacity for mobilizing his organic resources for fight or flight that we call emotional reactions. These often overwhelming reactions may become established as persistent affective responses or chronic feelings, often as disturbing and self-defeating responses. But again we see how a basic organic capacity and functional process can be patterned, channelled, modified, and, under favorable treatment, the child may escape from its primitive coercion over his conduct. Learning to manage his emotional reactions is probably the most difficult lesson the child faces.

The child gives up some of his physiological autonomy — the self-regulation of hunger, elimination, sleep — and accepts parental regulation and control. He eats when meals are provided, he eliminates when required, he is less and less dominated by his own organic needs and impulses. He gains freedom for a variety of activities by accepting this external regulation of his physiological processes and transformation of his organic needs into socially approved goal-seeking.

As the child grows and becomes mobile, he explores the world and soon finds that his active approaches and manipulations are blocked, frustrated, often punished. From these repeated experiences of being stopped and hearing “don’ts,” he gradually learns to transform the parental prohibitions into self-administered inhibitions, learning to say “No” and “Don’t” to himself.

Likewise he learns to inhibit his own impulsive activities and to utilize the prescribed patterns we call manners, eti-

quette, cleanliness, the early expression of the masculine and feminine roles, etc.—performing these prescribed activities even when no parent is present to require his performance.

Here we see how the naive, impulsive reactions to the world around him are gradually changed as his impulsive *behavior* is transformed into patterned, orderly, purposive *conduct* addressed, not to the geographical world, but to the social, cultural world as defined for him by parents and other adults. This learned conduct makes possible what we call private property, the integrity of the individual and the continuation of all the patterns, practices, rituals in and through which social order is carried on.

While these lessons are being learned, the child begins to understand language, usually before he can speak himself. He learns that every thing, person, place, event, has a name and a definition, and soon he is inducted by parents and others into the symbolic world of meanings and values, as defined by the basic conceptions and assumptions of his family traditions.

The child, guided by adults, builds up a frame of reference in which his experience becomes ordered and meaningful. He relinquishes his naive contact with the geographical world and learns to live in the cultural world as *he interprets it*, which may be described as transforming the world around him into the idiomatic meanings and significances, which he has learned to perceive, imputing to it his individualized version of cultural values and the possibilities or purposes, as he has learned to think, to feel, to perceive.

It is becoming increasingly clear that each person perceives the world according to what he conceives and expects it to be, as he puts meanings into every person and situation

in accordance with his experience. Thus each person develops a highly selective awareness of the world, with his own individual feelings toward persons and events as he perceives them. As we will discuss later, each culture is a selective version of the world, an expression of its basic assumptions and beliefs about nature and man, which each member of the cultural group learns in his own idiomatic fashion, for ordering his experience and patterning his activities.

What seems to be of major significance is that there may be a carefully formulated version of the beliefs and assumptions, the goals and values of the cultural traditions, often recorded and more or less authoritatively expounded, with recognized variations as in religious beliefs. But each family cherishes its own version of these traditions, often incomplete and frequently distorted and reflecting class and regional variations. Moreover, each parent has his or her own personal individualized version which he or she translates and transmits to the child with greater or less emotional reinforcement, according to the occasion and the lesson being taught, and also according to the feeling of the parent to that child.

What parents tell their child and expect him to accept as tradition, may be, and usually is, a variation from the "official" version of their culture. Moreover, what the child actually learns may be warped and distorted by his feelings, by his lack of understanding or misunderstanding of what he has been told and by his failure to grasp parental teachings and integrate them with previous learning.

Thus it appears that each child grows up to become a participating member of social order, a bearer of tradition, who lives in a symbolic world of meanings and values, of

beliefs and assumptions derived from tradition, but always more or less individually deviated and often distorted.

To live in his society, to be a member of his cultural group, to find fulfillment within the opportunities and limitations of his social order, the individual must utilize the common patterns of language, of conduct, of ritual, of institutional practices like buying and selling, acting, courtship and marriage, conforming to the expectations of others at least sufficiently to be able to participate, to find fulfillment of his needs and purposes through various human relations and concerted or group activities.

Moreover, having grown up in a specific cultural tradition, he will and must see the world, invest all situations and events with the meanings that he has learned as *the* way to understand the world. Here, indeed, we see cultural coercion of the individual. It should be remembered that every culture has transformed the geographical world into the symbolic world of its basic beliefs and assumptions, just as every culture has transformed the human organism into a member of its social order and a bearer of its traditions.

Each culture has selectively recognized and utilized some aspects of its environment and has ignored or neglected what it does not so recognize or value. Each culture has selectively recognized and utilized some of the potentialities of human nature, and has ignored or repressed what it does not recognize or approve, believing its version to be *the* human nature.

When we talk about human nature, we usually mean the kind of human nature with which we are familiar as a product of our cultural traditions. The cultural anthropologists have been helping us to recognize our provincialism and "cultural determinism."

In the light of this very abbreviated statement of how the child is socialized and culturized, we may say that each individual conforms, fits into, adjusts, channels and transforms his organic needs, impulses, capacities, according to the requirements and limitations of his group traditions. But in doing so he develops his own idiomatic, idiosyncratic, individualized way of doing so, and in the course of this development his personality emerges as a unique, dynamic process, of maintaining his "life space." Within the "private world" of his "life space" the individual thus may feel, think and act more or less individually, making choices, seeking goals that he himself has chosen even though that choice and those goals are expressions of his cultural traditions and of his own past experience.

If we will recognize that personality is not a static entity, nor a collection of discrete traits, nor any unnatural or demonic entity, we will begin to see that we are faced with a new and very promising conception. Personality may be viewed as a dynamic process, how the individual, while being socialized and culturized, learns to create and maintain his "life space" within the social order and the cultural world, always interpreted in his own individualized way.

Each individual in his "life space" continually maintains the symbolic cultural world by investing all situations and persons with the meanings and values defined by traditions, but always as he interprets them and feels toward them. He creates and maintains his "life space" as if he lived in a "private world" of his own, but in doing so he contributes to the maintenance of the larger social order and the cultural world which exists only through the activities of all members of the group.

We may have difficulty in grasping this situation because

of the long accepted assumption of society and culture as superhuman, extrahuman entities, or systems to which the individual was subjected, as to gravitation or the weather. Also, we may find it difficult to grasp this conception of "life space" and of a "private world" as a product of the personality process with its selective perception and patterned conduct, because of our traditional assumption of subjectivity and psychic entities.

What we are now being offered is a conception of a dynamic circular process in which the individual, in all his beliefs, actions, feelings, along with other similarly culturized individuals, continually creates his "life space" and thereby carries on the social-cultural way of life, to which he is continually responsive.

Let me re-emphasize this by saying that the individual member of society, of a cultural group, actively maintains the social order and perpetuates the cultural traditions, by which his own personal life is "determined." The very process of living, exhibited by all the individual personalities, constantly acting, thinking, speaking, feeling in their idiomatic expression of cultural traditions and social patterns, constitutes social order and maintains the culture which patterns and governs whatever the individual does. This is how a dynamic circular process operates.

There is cultural coercion, in the sense that the individual growing up in a culture learns to organize his experience, learns to think, to believe, to speak, to act and to feel according to what tradition permits, encourages and prohibits. He escapes the coercion of his organic necessities and impulses in and through the patterns offered by his cultural tradition, but ordinarily he is a prisoner of his culture.

It is as if in early childhood every child were hypnotized,

and while in trance were told that for the rest of his life he would only perceive what he was instructed to perceive, would think only as he was indoctrinated, would act and feel according to the prescriptions then being given. This is almost literally what occurs, since the helpless, dependent, credulous child must believe what he is told, must conform to adult requirements and prohibitions, must, as he grows older, learn to live according to the practices, institutions, rituals and symbols that his group have established to make their lives orderly and purposeful. He will continue to believe, to follow these early patterns without realizing they are coercive, because they pattern and control all his perception, reflection and actions.

Occasionally a gifted person, like the artist or poet, may partially escape some of this cultural coercion and conceive-perceive new forms, relationships, new meanings and possibilities, thereby giving new patterns to others to follow. Culture is not a closed, fixed system except as it prohibits critical and creative thinking and imaginative explorations.

Now, as I interpret this situation today, we are offered a fruitful conception of a dynamic circular process, of individual members of a group creating and maintaining their social order and their cultural worlds, which in turn operates through other individuals as a social field to which they must conform within certain tolerated limits of deviations (criminal and psychotic). Some personalities are so warped or stunted in their development that they become what we call neurotic or psychotic (always in terms of their cultural patterns); even these mentally ill cannot escape from their culture.

Here we have cultural coercion (determinism if you prefer that term), not by some superhuman static mechanism,

but rather by a dynamic human process operating within personalities upon other personalities, a self-perpetuating process in that every child born into the group is reared to participate in the process, to accept it, to perpetuate it in others, and he cannot ordinarily escape from its coercion.

But so soon as we recognize that our cultural world is man's own creation, an expression of his beliefs and assumptions about nature and human nature, we can escape from the older belief in an inexorable determinism to a more challenging prospect.

Here may I recall what has happened in theoretical physics with the introduction of new conceptions that have freed us from the older mechanistic conception of a rigidly deterministic world, so that without denying the obvious regularities and cause and effect sequences, we can envisage a world of change, development, of dynamic processes of untold potentialities.

So long as we thought of man as a passive subject in a social-cultural world, that existed and operated above and beyond human beings, we were impressed by the seeming helplessness, the impotence of man, the insignificance of the individual in the group. Cultural determinism reflected that climate of opinion just as classical social theories reflected the 18th century Newtonian model.

Now we can say that we are controlled by cultural traditions so long as we accept them and are unaware that we are so controlled. As we have recently discovered, the individual personality is at the mercy of his "forgotten childhood," is coerced by those childhood experiences, *so long as they are "forgotten,"* that is, not recognized as operating in his later adult life. When he becomes aware of them, realizes that he does not have to go on repeating endlessly the patterns

and relationships he developed in childhood (when that was the best he could do), then, with that recognition he may begin to reorient his life, reconstruct his "life space" and redesign his "private world." It may not be easy, and for many it is a long, laborious, sometimes discouraging task, requiring professional guidance, but it is a possibility, as psychotherapy has shown.

In much the same way we may say that as we have become aware of other cultures and have begun to look critically at our own traditions, we recognize that the beliefs and assumptions we cherish were developed long ago when there was little or no dependable knowledge of nature or understanding of human nature. We see that some of these very traditions now operate to frustrate our aspirations, giving rise to many of our most acute conflicts and defeats. Recognizing this, we can, indeed we must, critically examine all our traditions and courageously create new ideals and patterns to replace those that have become archaic and self-defeating.

Recently we have been inclined to the psychiatric conception of intra-psychic conflicts and to assume that much of the tragic human wastage and self-defeat were the products of internal conflict between instincts and the super ego and emotions. It is becoming clear that these intra-psychic conflicts are generated by our cultural traditions and the methods of child care and education they sanction. These conflicts arise in the "private worlds" of individuals, but they are products of our traditional beliefs and customary patterns of human relations, especially parent-child relations, which we can and must alter to avoid the immense toll of human defeat and frustration that in turn disturbs our social life.

Thus, for example, the ancient belief that sex is evil enters into the growing child's image of his own body and distorts his or her sexual maturation and adult functioning in a way that no other non-western culture exhibits. Likewise, the ancient belief that human nature is innately wicked and sinful or fallen from grace may warp the emerging personality and lead to frequent self-defeat.

Those who grow up in our culture must, as indicated earlier, build up a "life space," a "private world" in terms of all the conflicts and incongruities, the historically developed, but now archaic beliefs that, generation after generation, produce unhappy, self-defeated personalities. We inculcate in our children the aspiration toward humanly desirable conduct, and then give them these traditional beliefs and expectations and an image of the self that block their achievement of these aspirations!

It is, in my opinion, the responsibility of all those concerned with personality problems to recognize, underlying every human conflict and personality disturbance, these traditional beliefs and patterns that generate or aggravate these difficulties, not as abstract intellectual factors, but as they are expressed, communicated, imposed by older personalities upon the growing child and youth. The psychiatrists and social workers and clinical psychologists have an especial obligation to help us recognize how much of human distortion and defeat arises from these cultural traditions, as revealed by the individual personalities they are studying and treating. Only as we become convinced by such evidence will we be ready to acknowledge the source of so many of our social problems and individual personality distortions in our traditional beliefs and practices.

The doctrine of individual responsibility was a great eth-

ical advance, but today it must be enlarged and supplemented by the doctrine of cultural responsibility. We cannot permit archaic and self-defeating traditions and outmoded patterns of human relations to persist, continually giving rise to the immense human wastage and tragic conflicts that are so frequent today. We, the bearers of tradition who cherish human values, can and must accept the responsibility for reformulating our cultural traditions in order to foster responsible, self-disciplined personalities who can create and carry forward a humanly desirable social order. Only by accepting this cultural responsibility can we maintain individual responsibility, since the individual is so largely a product of his culture.

If we genuinely desire human responsibility, then we must examine critically what we now transmit to our children and youth as ideas and as patterns of conduct and of interpersonal relationships that block them in learning to be responsible. Only as we foster personalities who are capable of self-disciplined conduct, who can accept the denials and frustrations of group living, as well as the privileges and opportunities of adult life, without persistent conflicts and chronic feelings of anxiety or resentment, only thus can we expect individuals to become individually responsible.

A humanly desirable social order thus appears as a way of life which members of that society can and will strive to maintain and to advance as an aspiration toward the fulfillment of their human potentialities and their values. This kind of social order is not something imposed, to which the individual submits from fear or under coercion, but rather as the only way the individual, a product of his culture and his own idiomatic development, can find fulfillment of his own human potentialities.

Here may I refer to cultural relativity and explain that this term is frequently misunderstood. It means, as I see it, that every belief, every pattern of conduct, every relationship exhibited by a group is relative to the whole cultural context and must be seen and understood in that context. We cannot isolate any one pattern, any one relationship, and assume we can take it over into another culture, as is often suggested.

Moreover, cultural relativity also implies that every belief, every practice and institution is to be viewed as relative to the time of its initiation or early development, when it expressed the contemporary conceptions and understanding that today may have become wholly anachronistic, even archaic, defeating the persistent aspirations of the cultural group.

As thus interpreted, cultural relativity is not a threat to order and values, but essential to the task of renewing our culture through critical creative thinking.

There is obviously and inescapably, cultural coercion; there must be a patterning, a channelling, a transformation of the naive impulsive organism into a personality. As human beings we cannot live on the level of physiological functioning and unpatterned impulse. We require goals and purposes, meanings and values to give life some tension, some direction, some goals that will engage our capacities and direct our strivings.

We require a common shared body of beliefs and assumptions, of aspirations, so that each of us can live in the same symbolic world of meanings and values, pursue the same goals and values, but do so as individualized personalities with our different capacities and idiomatic interpretations of those common goals.

This is the great role of culture, as man's endeavor to make human living significant, to release him from the organic coercions that control the lives of infra-human organisms, so he can live in a symbolic world, a human world of his own creation.

Within each culture there is provided more or less opportunity for the development of the unique personality who, utilizing what his traditions offer, can and does create a way of life, a private world of his own. We western people have long believed in the worth of the individual but, as we are now realizing, many of our traditional beliefs have been in conflict with that ideal.

The crucial question we face today, as we see the breakdown of the historic traditions that we and all other cultures have utilized to give their lives order, is what can we do to renew our cultures, to find new beliefs and assumptions for those that have become archaic, so we can carry on the endless attempt to make human life more significant, more meaningful, ever more effectively recognizing the worth of the individual.

This is not a task of building a superhuman system, of erecting a utopian culture out somewhere in space, nor of submitting to some inevitable historic process that operates above and beyond human direction. According to the dynamic conception here presented, we can alter and improve culture only in and through personalities who are the dynamic agents of tradition, who will utilize the new beliefs and assumptions, the new insights and understandings, in their own private worlds and in all their human relations, and by that process will contribute to the necessary reorientation of our culture.

Everyone today has the great privilege and the immense

responsibility of deciding which of our traditions he or she will perpetuate or will terminate, by refusing to accept them or transmit them to his or her children or pupils. This is probably the first age in which that has become possible, as we see in the current revision of marriage, and of parent-child relations.

Perhaps if we had a realization of our active roles in culture, some understanding that we have these opportunities, that we are *free* to make choices and to discriminate, indeed that we *must* make choices and learn anew as the only way to maintain our values, then we might be encouraged and inspired to more constructive action. To say we must make choices is to recognize that many of our traditional beliefs and patterns have become obsolete and often impossible to follow and must be replaced.

In the light of these new dynamic conceptions of culture and personality, it would appear to be highly desirable, may I say urgently necessary, that we critically examine all our religious traditions to see if they may be perpetuating ideas and assumptions that are obtrusive, even destructive, to the goals and values we cherish. This applies especially to the historic conception of human nature that western European traditions have long accepted, wherein man has been given an image of himself as helpless and impotent to save himself, an image that is not congruous with the high ideals he is expected to attain nor one that fosters a conviction of his own potentialities and responsibilities.

The role of religion today may therefore be, not to continue asserting man's weakness and dependence, but to strengthen people, to give them the courage to make these choices, helping them to clarify their values and to reorient

their thinking, their feeling and their conduct. For this service, all those engaged in religious organization, in schools and other similar agencies, need the new understanding and insights coming from the study of personality and of culture.

Moreover, we should recognize that the only way we can hope to maintain our values, to carry on the cultural enterprise, is by accepting the necessity for continual revision of our traditions, as the essential cultural process. It is not the specific beliefs, the long accepted assumptions and patterns that are culturally significant, but rather the enduring aspirations, that have been translated by our predecessors into those beliefs and assumptions, but which can and must be revised in the light of new awareness and understanding.

We may find in the history of medicine, of art, and of science, illustrations of this process, where change, revision, critical thinking operate to further their goals and express their persistent aspirations.

Thus, medicine from its earliest days has been an endeavor to heal the sick, to relieve human suffering. Continually over the centuries, physicians have accepted ideas about disease and the human body and methods of treatment which they have later rejected in the light of new knowledge and understanding. Medicine today relies upon constant research and testing to enable the physician to go on providing ever more effective medical care, giving up older ideas and practices as essential to that aspiration.

Likewise, artists over the centuries have sought for ever more significant forms, compositions, colors, continually experimenting and replacing older patterns with new, as essential to the creative process. When art has been for-

bidden to explore and to develop new forms, it has become sterile.

Again, science over the centuries has been a search for order, for understanding the universe and all its events. The progress of science is dependent upon critical thinking, the willingness to replace any assumption and to revise any finding as necessary to the aspiration of science. Indeed, science is significant, not primarily for its findings as for its ability continually to ask the "right" questions that will further the aim of understanding events.

In the same way we may think of culture as a human endeavor that we can and must continually renew and revise as the only way we can express the persistent aspirations of our traditions, and continually gain new freedom for man through renewal of culture. Thus we pay our great debt to our predecessors and prepare the way for our successors.

We can today, I believe, offer a new and fruitful conception of culture and the individual; viewing the individual as no longer a helpless social atom, subject to the operation of vast social forces, nor as a passive member of a culture submitting to the coercion of traditions. Rather we can see the individual as the dynamic agent who, with increasing recognition of his place and role in social order, of his inescapable but potentially creative participation in culture, can make choices, can set goals that will increasingly alter the social order and redirect the culture. This points to a conception of a self-repairing social order, of an ever-growing, continually developing culture as man's own creation. Such a conception can and will become operational when every individual recognizes his essential place in the group and the great privileges and responsibilities this conception opens to him.

As I see it, in these recently developed ways of thinking about the individual and his culture, we are beginning to understand more clearly than ever before the meaning of our cherished belief in the worth of the individual personality, beginning to grasp the full implications of our aspiration toward the dignity of man, including, nowadays, woman and child. To be a bearer of tradition, to participate in this great human endeavor, to contribute to the advancement of culture is to enjoy human dignity.

Only as the individual has a sense of his own worth, a feeling that his dignity is respected, can he measure up to these new opportunities to be a creative member of society, an active participant in advancing his culture toward the values we seek.

THE AUTHOR

THIS ADDRESS WAS DELIVERED BY DR. LAWRENCE K. FRANK at the Institute on "Man, Morals and Society," held on the Cincinnati campus of the Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion on Tuesday, April 3, 1951.

Dr. Frank has long been active in the field of human relations. His name has been associated with the *psycho-cultural approach* which integrates insights from the fields of psychoanalysis, psychology, sociology and cultural anthropology.

Born in Cincinnati, Dr. Frank was graduated from Columbia University. Until recently he was director of the Caroline Zachry Institute of Human Development. Among his publications are: *Society as the Patient*, New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 1949; and *Nature and Human Nature*, New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 1951. Dr. Frank has participated actively in such organizations as the American Orthopsychiatric Association, National Conference on Family Relations, American Psychological Association, etc. He is a pioneer thinker and social philosopher. In the words of Mr. Lyman Bryson: "He demands that we re-examine our most sacred loyalties. He insists that we gain for ourselves, in spite of discomfort, the freedom to think out afresh all the traditions and institutional attachments that hamper our growth."

THE DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RELATIONS

The Joshua Loth Liebman Department of Human Relations was established for the purpose of studying the interrelations of religion and the social sciences. To this end, in addition to offering academic courses as part of the regular program of training for rabbinic leadership, the department sponsors periodic institutes in which visiting authorities in the field of human relations lecture on problems of common concern to the scientist and to the student and teacher of religion.

Among the notable participants in the Institute on "Aspects of Religion and Psychiatry" (Spring, 1948) was the late Rabbi Joshua L. Liebman, in whose memory the Department of Human Relations was named.

The 1951 Institute considered the implications of significant modern insights in the allied field of cultural anthropology, with special reference to the tensions, values, and moral problems in the experience of man and society today.



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